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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1787
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RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2653
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000824

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EU](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: EU RAISES HUMAN RIGHTS CASES OF
CONCERN DURING "DIALOGUE"

Classified By: CDA RICHARD E. HOAGLAND: 1.4(B), (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: An EU delegation met for nine hours with Government of Turkmenistan officials on June 24, discussing steps the government could take to improve civil, religious, media, and other rights in the country. In the course of the meeting, the delegation also passed an EU-vetted list of individuals who are either prisoners of concern or individuals who have been prevented from traveling abroad this past year. The list requested information on the health and whereabouts of the aforementioned prisoners, but also of those individuals named in the Moscow Mechanism report of March 2003 who are still imprisoned in connection with the attack on former President Niyazov's motorcade in 2002. The EU delegation did not raise the case of Sazak Durdymuradov, whose detention and mistreatment only surfaced on the eve of the meeting. Government of Turkmenistan officials did not have an immediate reaction to the presentation of the list, but stoically promised to respond formally to the list and its requests. Any formal, written response to the EU request will certainly provide indicators of the government's commitment to address human rights abuses. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) PolOff met UK Ambassador Peter Butcher on July 2 to discuss the bilateral human rights dialogue an EU delegation held with Turkmen officials on June 24. The delegation, led by Slovenian government representative Smiljana Knez, also included Javier Solana's personal referent on human rights, Riina Kionka. The Turkmen side was largely led by Institute for Democracy and Human Rights Director Shirin Ahmedova, but First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Wepa Hajiyeu and a small contingent of MFA representatives were also in attendance. The meeting was scheduled to last two hours, but surprisingly extended a full nine hours as the delegation sought general dialogue on freedom of religion, media, movement, and other issues, and passed a list of human rights cases and concerns for government response.

¶3. (C) Ahmedova, who had been provided with an advance schedule of the topics of the dialogue, addressed each issue with point-by-point prepared responses regarding Turkmenistan's efforts to improve human rights conditions, progress on development of a national strategy to implement human rights obligations, and additional mentions of specific

conventions and agreements to which Turkmenistan is a party. The EU delegation was impressed with Ahmedova, and interpreted her engagement during the meeting as a sign of her commitment to help the country fulfill its international obligations. According to Butcher, delegation members were less certain of how much influence Ahmedova will have on the process, but her performance during the meeting convinced them that she cared about the issue. German DCM Silke Hahn, however, told poloff on June 27 that the delegation had not been properly briefed for the unique conditions and environment of Turkmenistan, and were ill-prepared to respond to this government's responses during the course of the meeting.

¶4. (C) As the discussion began to wind down, the EU delegation indicated to Ahmedova that it was passing to her a list of human rights cases of greatest concern to the EU. However, when they passed the list to her, First Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyeu took the list. The list, Ambassador Butcher said, is a far shorter and better-vetted list than one an EU delegation had presented to the Turkmen government in late 2007. The older list had been long and contained almost every name raised by international human rights organizations since January 2007, many of which EU officials were not able to verify. This list had caused some consternation among EU representatives and European diplomats, who thought the list was too long and had not been assembled using any specific methodology.

¶5. (C) The list that had been given to Turkmen officials on

ASHGABAT 00000824 002 OF 002

June 24 contained nine names, and was divided into two groups. The first were the names of individuals imprisoned in Turkmenistan about whom the EU would like to receive information regarding their health and whereabouts. Journalists Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khajiyev, former OSCE Ambassador Batyr Berdiyev, and construction manager Mukhametkuli Aymuradov were listed. The second half of the list was of individuals banned from travel abroad. The EU requested confirmation that they are banned from travel, and information on why the ban was imposed. Environmental activist Andrey Zatoka, Christian pastor Ilmyrat Nurlyyev, exile oppositionist sister Svetlana Orazova, her husband Ovez Annayev, and RFE/RL reporter's daughter Jennet Gylychurdyeva were listed. (NOTE: Post added identifying descriptives of the individuals. This information was not in the EU list. END NOTE.) The delegation did not raise the case of RFE/RL contributor Sazak Durdymuradov, news of whose detention and possible mistreatment broke on the eve of the dialogue.

¶6. (C) As a third and final point on the list the delegation passed, the EU requested further information on the health and whereabouts of all persons named in the OSCE Moscow Mechanism Report of 12 March 2003 who were still in prison. It also asked whether there were any plans to review their cases, and asked in particular for any information on the health and whereabouts of former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov, who was accused of being a master-mind of the 2002 attack on Niyazov's motorcade, and who is occasionally reported to have died in prison. According to Ambassador Butcher, Hajiyeu took over at this point and made a lengthy but somewhat confusing statement regarding the list, and denied the country had any kind of formal list of persons banned from travel abroad. At this point, Hajiyeu seemed to undermine this denial when he said that in the case of Andrey Zatoka, "the principles of entry and exit do not apply." Ultimately, Hajiyeu and Ahmedova agreed to review the list and requests contained within it, and said they would provide the EU with a formal written response.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Government of Turkmenistan officials did not have an immediate reaction to the presentation of the list, since the list included human rights abuses of the previous administration as well as of the current one. Any

formal, written response to the EU request will certainly
provide indicators of this government's commitment to
acknowledging and/or addressing human rights abuses. END
COMMENT.
HOAGLAND